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"Notes," from *Nebraska Bird Review* (December 1989) 57(4)

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NOTES

**MINK AND OTTER.** On a trip to West Point on 2 June 1989 I took N 79 north to Snyder. As I was travelling north near the town of Prague I noticed a large river otter loping through a field in broad daylight, paralleling a wooded stream. It probably was an itinerant, recently released, and was going about the business of looking for a better home. Later that day, near West Point, I saw a mink quickly cross the road from one stream to another, in the area of a wet prairie surrounding both sides of the road. I found it very unusual to see two mustelids in one day.

--- Larry Einemann, 2917 South 53rd Street, Lincoln, Neb. 68506

**SWAINSON'S HAWK MIGRATION.** On 27 September 1989, at approximately 0845, Jeff Blaser (a fisheries biologist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) reported seeing a large concentration of raptors in a field near the Kawasaki plant, west of Lincoln on the north side of N34. Mary Clausen (NGPC) and I

arrived at the site at approximately 0920 that same morning. The hawks were concentrated in a 60-80 acre newly disced wheat-stubble field (NW 1/4 S32 T11N R6E), surrounded by standing milo fields. Our initial count of birds on the ground turned up 100 hawks. At 0950 most of the hawks took flight, formed a large kettle, and drifted off to the north. The number of birds in the air was estimated at 110. At least 15 to 20 hawks were still on the ground, making the total number at 125 to 130 birds. Both immature and adult plumaged Swainson's Hawks were observed. However, no other species of hawks were seen. While the birds were on the ground they were scattered throughout the field. They were observed standing and then making quick, short dashes, after which they would reach down to the talons and pick up and devour a small food item. A walk out into the field, after most of the birds had flown, revealed grasshoppers to be in good supply among the clumps of disced vegetation. A few crickets were also observed. However, there was no evidence that an abundant supply of rodents was available. Winds were out of the south at 5-10 mph, skies were clear. Gerry Steinauer (NGPC) had reported seeing a large number of hawks in this same area the day before.

--- John J. Dinan, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission  
2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, Neb. 68503

**KESTRELS.** On 18 September 1989, after a dinner at the Odessa Interchange, we were birding along a county road south of the Platte River in Phelps Co. We saw a line of birds on the power line. It became Kestrels as we got closer. We counted 14 in the group. As we followed slowly along, the flock dipped and soared and resumed perching on the wire. We followed them for two miles along the power line, and then they sailed out into a corn field where we lost contact with them. It was the first "Kettle of Kestrels" we have encountered.

--- George and Marian Brown, 2018 12th Avenue, Kearney, Neb. 68847

**EDDIE, THE FEARLESS PRAIRIE-CHICKEN.** took up residence in April 1989 at the country mail box of Eleanor (my daughter) and Carl (my son-in-law) Hill, near Stella, Richardson Co. A busy county gravel road is six feet to the west of the mail box, and a lesser distance to the south is the gravel drive to the farm house a quarter mile away. Eddie's booming could be heard by the Hill family in the early morning, but it was his attacks on any car or pickup that moved by his grounds that was astonishing. People could stand and talk to Eddie, and he would strut, display his orange neck sac, raise the little feather horns, and even attack by pecking at legs, or drawing blood on an extended hand. The Hill family were fearful of his being killed, but Eddie survived the traffic and many spectators for ten weeks and then suddenly disappeared.

Eddie, a mixed-up Prairie-Chicken,



--- Jessamine McMullen, Box 82, Stella, Neb. 68442

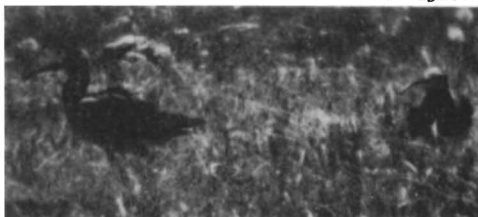
An account in *The Falls City Journal*, whose editor, George W. Schock, supplied the pictures, added that "Eddie generally runs alongside Carl's pickup, cackling and doing whatever else prairie chickens do, for about 100 yards before giving up and going back to the head of the lane. He also has ridden about a third of the way to the house on the hood of the pickup and has hitchhiked a ride on the tailgate of the pickup, even though Carl's dog is riding shotgun close to the cab."

**PEREGRINE FALCON IN GARDEN COUNTY.** On 6 May 1989 I drove to Crescent Lake NWR to attend their open house. Two tenths of a mile north of the north entrance to the refuge I noticed a raptor perched in a willow shelterbelt. Its overall appearance was dark back, white abdomen. I noted, too, a helmeted appearance to the head, that the largish appearing eye was set in the sides of the "helmet". I positioned my car blind so that the least amount of branches

and leaves obstructed my view because it seemed, improbably, that I had just come upon a Peregrine Falcon! Well, there is a direct negative correlation between the rarity of the bird and the likelihood that you'll either have Roger Tory Peterson birding with you or a 1200mm telephoto attached to a camera to give your report credibility. I went back to the site 7 May and found it perched in exactly the same spot I'd seen it the day before. With a little effort I photographed it from the car. According to the lens footage scale, it was only 65-70 feet away. I tried to approach it, however, and it took flight as soon as I got about 10 feet from the car. I established that the perch was about 15 feet from the ground. Ruth Green suggested that I contact Ross Lock, and he noted that he was unaware of any photos of migrating Peregrine Falcons taken in Nebraska. The slides (which unfortunately would not print up satisfactorily for use here - Ed.) were submitted to the Records Committee.

--- Doug G. Thomas, 1035 Mississippi Avenue, Alliance, Neb. 69301-2615

**WHIMBRELS IN CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA.** The Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) is considered by Johnsgard (*A Revised List of the Birds of Nebraska and Adjacent States*, 1986, Occ. Pap. NOU, No. 6) to be an extremely rare spring and fall migrant in Nebraska and occasional to rare migrant elsewhere in the Plains States. Rosche (*Birds of Northwestern Nebraska and Southwestern South Dakota*, 1982, published by the author, Chadron, Neb.) lists the species as an accidental spring and



autumn transient in northwestern Nebraska. Bray et al (*The Birds of Nebraska - A Critically Evaluated List*, 1986, published by the authors, Omaha, Neb.) designate the Whimbrel as casual in Nebraska. The following includes photo-documentation of this seldom Nebraska-seen species.

On the morning of 20 May 1989, while attending the Annual Meeting of NOU, Gary Lingle discovered two Whimbrels in southeastern Cherry Co. The birds were first noted in a native grass pasture between two marsh areas and near a gravel road. Around mid-day I also observed these birds, although they had moved approximately half a mile from where they were initially sighted and were well away from the road. I obtained permission from the landowner (Sears Ranch) and after driving through several pastures I was able to approach and photograph the birds from my car, at a distance of approximately 25 yards. Both individuals were noticeably smaller than the nearby Long-billed Curlews (*Numenius americanus*) and exhibited the brown and white boldly striped crown, dark eye line, and down-curved bill. The brownish colored rump and underwings were well noted; these are characteristic of the North American subspecies (*hudsonicus*). I watched the birds for approximately an hour; during that time they spent an approximately equal time resting and foraging. On my departure both birds were resting near the same location where I had found them. The birds were looked for the following day but were not rediscovered. Identifiable photographs are in the possession of the author and others have been sent to the NOU Records Committee.

--- Mark A. Brogie, Box 316, Creighton, Neb. 68729

**LEAST TERNS AT LAKE MCCONAUGHY.** On 2 August 1989 I observed an adult Interior Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*) and chick on the north shore of Lake McConaughy (S29, T15N, R38W, Keith Co.), between Arthur Bay and Martin Bay. To my knowledge, this is only the second documentation of Least Terns on



Lake McConaughy. Dr. Stephen Fretwell reported Least Terns on Lake McConaughy during the summer of 1977 (Birds of Lake McConaughy and the North Platte River Valley, Oshkosh to Keystone, *NBR* 52:26). Apparently, this area is on the western edge of the known range of the Least Terns on the North Platte River. The discovery of the unfledged chick is the first evidence of Least Tern breeding at Lake McConaughy and the western-most breeding on the North Platte River.

The adult was first observed at approximately 2 PM MDST. The lake elevation was 3246.5 feet. This low lake elevation had exposed large sand beaches around the lake. On approaching the area I saw an adult Least Tern sitting on an unvegetated area of sandy beach. I am familiar with the species from prior survey work on the Loup and Platte rivers. The adult had a yellow bill, white forehead, black head cap, gray back with black outer primaries, white underbelly, and a forked tail. The bird was approached to approximately 100-150 feet and viewed with binoculars for a short time. The Tern took to the air and slowly circled the area. With the adult in the air, I approached a nearby area of low-growing (6-12 inches tall) annual vegetation. A downy chick, roughly half the size of the adult bird, and uniformly colored light brownish-gray, ran out of the area. The adult immediately began an aggressive defense behavior, calling and dive-bombing. The young made no attempt to fly, but was very mobile on the ground. I retreated and continued to observe both birds from a distance. The adult returned to the ground, and the young returned to the nursery area of the low vegetation. The nursery was a few hundred yards from the lake, and about 100 yards from an isolated pocket of water to the north. A visit to the nursery area on 10 August revealed a second chick, estimated to be 2-3 days pre-fledging (Greg Wingfield, pers. comm.). It is unknown whether either chick fledged.

--- Mark M. Czaplewski, Nebraska Public Power District  
1414 15th Street, Columbus, Neb. 68601

**WINTER WREN.** About 10 AM 10 October 1986 I was sitting in the same blind in the same place it was when I photographed the Connecticut Warbler (*NBR* 56:99). This Winter Wren appeared, so I took its picture. The bird was sitting on the south edge of a tree lot near a small drainage ditch which drains the water away from the livestock well in the corral. The location was just north of our ranch buildings, seven miles west and one mile south and .25 mile west of Chambers.

Like all wrens, this little guy was very active, and it took several minutes before it held still long enough for me to get this picture. Soon after I took the picture it disappeared into some brush and I never saw it again. When I took this picture the Wren was about 18 feet away. I used a Minolta Maxium camera with a 75 to 300 mm lens plus a 2X Teleconverter.

--- Loren Blake, HC 63, Box 18, Chambers, Neb. 68725



**BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK** About 8:30 AM 9 May 1989 I was in the yard at our ranch, west of Chambers, when I heard an unfamiliar bird call coming from a large plum thicket at the west edge of our yard. After watching for several minutes I finally saw a flash of orange. Then, after another short wait, this Black-headed Grosbeak came into clear view. He seemed to be feeding among the leaves and small branches. He was around the thicket for about an hour and then disappeared.

--- Loren E. Blake, HC 63, Box 18,  
Chambers, Neb. 68725

**1988 CHRISTMAS COUNT TEXT CORRECTION.** It is Burwell, not Burchard, that is is on the SE edge of the Calmus-Loup count area (*NBR* 57:6).